

REMARKS

The applicants acknowledge and appreciate receiving an initialed copy of the form PTO-1449 that was filed on 3 February 2004.

Claims 4-18 are pending. Claims 1 and 2 have been canceled. Claims 12-18 are new. The applicants respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of this application in view of the above amendments and the following remarks.

Claims 2, 4, and 6-9 were rejected under 35 USC 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. Claim 2 has been canceled and will not be discussed. As for claims 4 and 6-9, the office action listed several matters including a lack of antecedent basis and improper Markush language. These matters have been corrected, and the applicants respectfully request withdrawal of this rejection.

Claims 1-11 were rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over WO99/19060 to Naito. Claims 1 and 2 have been canceled and will not be discussed. As for claims 3-11, the applicants respectfully request that this rejection be withdrawn for the following reasons.

Initially, this rejection fails to set forth what is supposed to be obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art. The rejection is purportedly based on section 103; however, the office action states that the drawings show the claimed subject matter. If the drawings show the claimed subject matter, then why is the rejection not based on section 102? What is not disclosed that requires obviousness?

Claim 3 has been amended essentially to include the limitations of canceled claims 1 and 2. Claim 3 recites, among other things, a ceramic carrier comprising a ceramic substrate and a

multitude of pores or elements that directly support a catalyst component on the surface of the ceramic substrate. Further, claim 3 recites that the catalyst component contains metal elements having NO_x absorbent capacity.

Neither the WIPO publication to Naito et al. nor the US patent to Naito et al. discloses or suggests a catalyst component that contains metal elements supported directly by pores, as claimed in claim 3. The patent to Naito et al. states that "at least two kinds of fine noble metal particles are dispersed and fixedly mounted on the surface of brown millerite type composite oxide particles." See col. 2, lines 18-20 of the patent to Naito et al. Thus, the metal-containing catalyst component (15 in Fig. 1 and 34 in Fig. 9) is not supported directly on the surface of the cordierite and is not supported directly by pores, as claimed. The catalyst components 15, 34 are supported by intermediate particles 13, 33. Therefore, this rejection should be withdrawn.

The office action states that Figs. 1 and 9 of the Naito et al. references show the claimed direct support. However, Figs. 1 and 9 simply show what is disclosed in col. 2, lines 18-20 of the patent to Naito et al. That is, Figs. 1 and 9 simply show noble metal catalyst particles 15, 34 dispersed and fixedly mounted on the surface of intermediate brown millerite type composite oxide particles 13, 33.

Claims 4-7 and 9-11 depend, directly or indirectly, on claim 3. Thus, claims 4-7 and 9-11 are considered to be patentable at least for the reasons given above with respect to claim 3.

Claim 8 has been amended to essentially include the limitations of canceled claims 1 and 2. Claim 8, like claim 3, recites, among other things, a ceramic carrier comprising a ceramic substrate and a multitude of pores or elements that directly support a catalyst component on the surface of the ceramic substrate. Further, claim 8 recites that the catalyst component contains metal elements having NO_x absorbent capacity. Therefore, claim 8 is considered to be

patentably distinct from the Naito et al. references for at least the reasons given above with respect to claim 3.

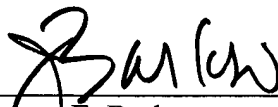
In addition, claim 8 recites that the pores that directly support the catalyst component have a diameter or width 1000 times the diameter of the ion of the catalyst to be supported or smaller, and the density of pores is $1 \times 10^{11}/L$ or higher. Neither of the references to Naito et al. discloses or suggests this relationship between the diameter of an ion of the catalyst and the pores and this pore density. The office action fails to treat these limitations and those of all the dependent claims. Therefore, the rejection of claim 8 should be withdrawn.

Claims 12-18 are new. Claims 12-18 depend, directly or indirectly, on claim 8. Therefore, claims 12-18 are considered to be in condition for allowance based on the limitations recited in their base claim.

In view of the foregoing, the applicants respectfully submit that this application is in condition for allowance. A timely notice to that effect is respectfully requested. If questions relating to patentability remain, the examiner is invited to contact the undersigned by telephone.

Please charge any unforeseen fees that may be due to Deposit Account No. 50-1147.

Respectfully submitted,



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